

Patriotism, Propaganda and Public Opinion in Nazi Occupied
Belorussia, 1941-1944.

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	III
Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Foundations	7
Chapter 2: Belorussia – Dear Soviet Land!	18
Chapter 3: Shoulder to Shoulder – Germans and Belorussians	34
Chapter 4: Between the Hammer and the Anvil	48
Conclusion	61
Bibliography	64

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Introduction

This dissertation examines the concept of patriotism, the use of propaganda to foster it in Nazi occupied Belorussia, and the experiences of the native population throughout the years from 1941 to 1944. The narrative that runs through much of the existing literature on the Soviet theatre of war gives few references to the experiences of occupied Belorussia. When discussing Belorussia during this period, there is a tendency to portray the population as clearly separated into camps of collaborators that welcomed the arrival of the German Army, and those who opposed the Nazi occupation, or society as clearly shifting from a position of collaboration to resistance, in rather a simplistic categorical generalisation. Through considering Soviet attempts to foster a Soviet patriotism amongst the Belorussian population, German attempts to develop anti-Soviet sentiment, and the day-to-day experiences and concerns of those living within occupied Belorussia, it is the intention of this dissertation to demonstrate that the existence of a unified outlook that could be termed ‘Belorussian public opinion’ did not develop during the war. Nor could there be said to have been a set of clearly defined opposing trends in public opinion, but rather, underneath the convenient, wide embracing titles, there existed a complex of opinions, sentiments, considerations, and loyalties that engaged and vied with each other, interacting in both complementary and contradictory modes. The result of that is that Belorussian wartime public opinion, *per se*, can be viewed as fluid, multi-faceted, and often contradictory both on a societal and an individual level.

In an examination of literature on World War II that does address events in Belorussia during the period of occupation, it can be seen that the focus tends to be, primarily, on the areas of partisan resistance, local collaboration with the occupation authorities and participation within the apparatus of Nazi rule, and the Holocaust. Whilst these subjects are important for interpreting and understanding public opinion at the time in Belorussia, the issue is that most historical surveys seem to deal with these subjects in isolation, in military or political terms, focusing on the mechanics and procedures of the events themselves, either entirely overlooking the discussion of public opinion, and how either of the warring powers attempted to promote their agenda and appeal to the Belorussian public, or making passing references in the process of their discussions. For example, in Leonid D. Grenkevich’s *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944*, the author’s main

focus is on the role of the Soviet leadership's directives in shaping the partisan movement, overlooking other factors that would have influenced the population's attitude towards the partisans.¹ Other authors follow a different approach that portrays the Belorussian public acting, almost exclusively, in response to actions taken by the Germans, rather than directives given by the Soviets, in manner that by-passes the loyalties of individuals and the portrayal of the war and occupation by each side.² Discussions of German attempts to develop support through the use of propaganda are also overlooked in favour of the mechanics of various policies pursued with that end in mind.³ The focus of this dissertation is to consider the attempts by both sides to use propaganda as a means of interacting with the loyalties and concerns of the population, as well as considering the experiences of Belorussians that would have impacted on the reception and interaction with these messages.

In approaching the topic 'Patriotism, Propaganda and Public Opinion in Nazi Occupied Belorussia, 1941-1944', the overall aim of this dissertation is to arrive at an appreciation of the chaotic and contradictory nature of life in Belorussia under the occupation. This is achieved through addressing a number of individual themes and research objectives in the course of the following chapters. Chapter One considers, first of all, the question of what can be meant by 'patriotism', as well as focusing on an interpretation of the nature of public opinion. This chapter also gives some contextual background on the existence of a Belorussian national identity at the time of the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany. In order to situate this dissertation within the existing literary studies that cover the subject of the B.S.S.R. under Nazi occupation, some of the approaches to the subject taken in those works are discussed and evaluated, demonstrating the latitude for the analysis advanced herein.

¹ Leonid D. Grenkevich, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944. A Critical Historiographical Analysis* (London, 1999).

² Ivan S. Lubachko, *Belorussia Under Soviet Rule, 1917-1957* (Lexington, 1972), Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia, The Making of a Nation: A Case Study* (Cambridge, 1956), Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford, 1989), and Ben Shepperd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, 2004).

³ Schulte, *The German Army*; Timothy Patrick Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942-1943* (New York, 1988), and Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (London, 1981).

Chapter Two offers an in-depth analysis of the use of propaganda, by the Soviet side, in an attempt to promote a concept of patriotism that identified with the broader anti-fascist struggle, to gain an influence on public opinion, and to win support for the fight against the Germans. The objective of this analysis is to demonstrate the messages and images that were being directed towards the Belorussian population in the midst of the events that were taking place around them. In Chapter Three the focus is switched to an analysis of the propaganda materials produced and circulated by the Nazi ruling authorities. These, like the Soviet material, were intended to try and foster support amongst the local population by showing the occupiers as having Belorussian interests at heart, alienating the Soviets from the population, and indicating that life under the Germans would be far superior to that under Communist rule. Coupled with the material in Chapter Two, the objective is to emphasise how the native inhabitants were bombarded imagery attempting to portray each side as their natural ally, regardless of the reality of how events unfolded. Finally, Chapter Four highlights the experience of the population themselves, conveying the stressful and contradictory experiences that had to be endured regularly. This chapter is critical to developing the concept of the existence of multiple public opinions and attitudes to patriotic stances, dependent on the intersection between the two in the case of each individual.

This dissertation is a qualitative study, based on the evaluation of the primary source material gathered in the course of time spent in the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk, the Belarusian State Museum of History of the Great Patriotic War, Minsk, the Brest Regional Archives, and the print section of the Brest Regional Archives, as well as a published collection of Belorussian and Russian language newspapers produced by the Soviet authorities for circulation in Belorussia during the occupation. A range of secondary material helps to set the historical context, giving a sense of the overall situation in Belorussia during the period being discussed, facilitating the interpretation of the archive material to articulate the proposed argument. The National Archives yielded a selection of Soviet propaganda material for use in the analysis of the imagery and messages being conveyed to the Belorussian audience. They also contained a wide range of material from various partisan formations which gave an excellent insight

into the situation on the ground in Belorussia during the occupation, and the issues that the population had to contend with. Unfortunately, time constraints restricted the amount of sources gathered from the Museum of History of the Great Patriotic War. However, notations made on some correspondence between Red Army soldiers and family members gave an indication of some of the emotional considerations that would have been at work in the minds of the population. The two archives in Brest yielded a range of anti-Soviet newspapers, leaflets and pamphlets showing the nature of the messages being put forward by Nazi propagandists. Furthermore, there were also files containing reports to the occupation police force, as well as post-liberation statements pertaining to Nazi atrocities carried out on the territory of Belorussia. Through the interpretation of this range of primary source material, with reference to the existing secondary literature, a unique approach to the consideration of the interaction between patriotism, propaganda, and public opinion is demonstrated by this dissertation.

Chapter 1: Foundations

In approaching the topic of 'Patriotism, Propaganda and Public Mood in Nazi Occupied Belorussia, 1941-1944', it is important to consider what is meant by 'patriotism'. In addition, it is necessary to offer an interpretation of the nature of public opinion. Also relevant is the question of the extent to which the Belorussian people may be viewed as being nationally conscious at the time of the German invasion. This chapter will also review the existing literature relating to Belorussia during this period, to establish the contribution this dissertation will make to the understanding of the Nazi occupation of this area.

Amongst the various understandings of 'patriotism', some take it to reflect a loyalty to a particular nation.¹ Others argue that patriotism is the allegiance to a political model and the institutions that sustain it.² In the first sense, nationalist patriotism does not draw its inspiration from the political model of which a citizen is a part, but rather from the national group to which one belongs, with what counts as a nation being defined in terms of native language, cultural community, shared ancestry, and common history.³ The nation as 'a form of community implies both similarity among its members and difference from outsiders'.⁴ Gellner views homogeneity amongst the members of the community as a key trait of nationalist patriotism.⁵ This nationalist form of patriotism can be viewed as analogous with the family; being a social grouping that is not based on individual choice, nonetheless creating strong bonds amongst its members.⁶

Another form of patriotism is 'of an inherently *political* nature and is not dependent on national or ethnic identity'.⁷ The loyalty of the individual is to the political model that embodies the state. This civic patriotism is drawn from the tradition of republicanism, with the state being regarded as serving the common good of the citizens in the political sense, patriotism being the love shared by the citizens for the institutions that serve their

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany, 1995), pp 209-228

² Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1995).

³ Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kantian Patriotism', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2000), p. 319.

⁴ Monserrat Guibernau, *Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 80.

⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 2006), p. 132.

⁶ Kleingeld, 'Kantian Patriotism', p. 320.

⁷ Kleingeld, 'Kantian Patriotism', p. 317.

common good.⁸ In this case, ethnicity is not a determining factor in engendering patriotism. Indeed, it can be argued that civic patriotism is compatible with ethnic and national pluralism, provided the ethnic and national traditions are not inimical to the ideals embodied in the political commonwealth.⁹ Thus, in a multi-ethnic state, a particular grouping has its own identity, but within the broader, unifying political model. Patriotism, therefore, can be taken in either nationalist form or as a bond of loyalty to the political institutions of a country.

In focusing on public opinion within the territory of the B.S.S.R. under Nazi occupation, this dissertation will argue that public opinion was shaped by two contributory factors. Firstly, it was influenced by patriotic and ideological loyalties to either Soviet or independent Belorussia and, secondly, it was shaped by an infinite number of day-to-day concerns that presented themselves to each member of the populace. This results in a constant chaotic interaction or play between the personal day-to-day concerns and patriotic actions, resulting in a different manifestation in each individual, or, indeed, a range of manifestations within one individual, from one moment in time to another, as shaped by the interaction between the various concerns. In this sense, it becomes possible to engage with the idea of, not one or a couple, but, the potentiality for a multitude or infinite number of opinions within the public. Discussing Soviet popular opinion in the 1930s, Davies states that '[t]here were few absolute 'conformists' and 'dissenters'. In practice, people's views were far more ambivalent and contradictory'.¹⁰ Dealing with public opinion in the U.S.S.R. during the 1980s, Shlapentokh proposed that individuals operate on two different planes; that whilst supporting some social values which united them with others in society, individuals would still direct their behaviour and distribute their limited resources (time, money, emotions) among various conflicting goals.¹¹ This is a useful model to apply to the discussion of the Belorussian S.S.R under Nazi occupation, where the struggle for survival and personal concerns would have been

⁸ Kleingeld, 'Kantian Patriotism', p. 317.

⁹ Jurgen Habermas, 'Citizenship and National Identity', in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, 1996), pp 491-515.

¹⁰ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, propaganda and dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 6.

¹¹ Vladimir E. Shlapentokh, 'Two Levels of Public Opinion: The Soviet Case', *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (1985), pp 443-459.

central to one level, whilst patriotic identity would have influenced the other, with the two levels intersecting in varying manners throughout the population.

Having considered the concept of patriotism, and its interaction with everyday concerns in forming public opinion, it is worthwhile to consider if, divided both geographically and politically between Russia and Poland, it is possible to genuinely speak of a Belorussian national identity prior to and including the period of this dissertation. Discussing the Soviet takeover of Western Belorussia in September 1939, Gross states that there Belorussian ‘national aspirations had not yet been awakened’.¹² He attributes welcoming celebrations to Jewish areas, or districts where the Communist Party of Western Belorussia had maintained a stronghold throughout the 1930s, taking the passive response of Belorussians elsewhere as a tacit indication of a lack of national consciousness.¹³

However, contrary to Gross’ assertions, there had been indications of Belorussian national awareness prior to the Soviet takeover. Indeed, it can be said that, in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905, the Belorussian idea began to seriously compete with the imperial idea of the area simply being viewed as “West Russia”, with the first important Belorussian periodical, *Nasha Niva* (Our Soil), appearing in 1906.¹⁴ March 25, 1918, saw the declaration in Minsk of an independent Belorussian National Republic (BNR),¹⁵ whilst, in interwar Poland, Branislau Tarashkevich (1892-1938) was a prominent advocate of the Belorussian cause as a deputy in parliament, a director of Belorussian schools, and founder member of the peasant organisation, Hramada, eventually being imprisoned for his efforts.¹⁶ The Hramada started its activities in social and cultural work, soon developing into the largest political party in West Belorussia with anti-Soviet views, with its membership in 1927 being placed at 150,000.¹⁷ The Hramada

¹² Jan T. Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, 2002), p. 31.

¹³ Gross, *Revolution From Abroad*, pp 31-32.

¹⁴ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (Yale, 2003), pp 53-54.

¹⁵ Lubachko, *Belorussia*, p. 24.

¹⁶ Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, p. 66.

¹⁷ Lubachko, *Belorussia*, p. 130.

had a broad appeal, reaching out to peasants and workers, as well as members of the intelligentsia, such as Tarashkevich, amongst its number.¹⁸ A second Belorussian political party was the Belorussian Christian Democratic Party (BCD). The program of this party was based upon the principle of Belorussian unification and independence. The main support base for the Christian Democrats was largely the Belorussian intelligentsia.¹⁹ The existence of such independent Belorussian political action demonstrates the existence of a national consciousness or identity, whilst also going some way to explaining Gross' observation of a wary or less than enthusiastic response to the Soviet takeover.

In the Soviet territories of Eastern Belorussia, a growth in national awareness was also witnessed during the 1920s. Martin states that 'one must strongly emphasize the remarkable success of Belorussization in the 1920s. The Belorussian leadership was obsessed with the process of nation-building'.²⁰ Examples of this success are that the press became almost exclusively Belorussian, with there being only one exclusively Russian-language newspaper by 1929, and russified Belorussians in large numbers were shifting their official identity from Russian to Belorussian.²¹ Whilst the process of Belorussization was rolled-back extensively during the 1930s, the earlier efforts can be interpreted as laying the solid foundations of a national consciousness. Following the unification of East and West Belorussia under Soviet rule in September 1939, the series of deportations of Polish inhabitants from the western provinces contributed to an increased homogeneity of the Belorussian identity. Estimates for the numbers of those from the former Polish provinces deported to the Soviet interior vary from 1.5 million,²² and 1,646,000,²³ to 2 million Polish families.²⁴ Whilst these figures are representative of the total area seized by the U.S.S.R. from Poland, a significant portion of those deported resided in Belorussia, greatly reducing the Polish population of the newly expanded

¹⁸ Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, p. 66.

¹⁹ Lubachko, *Belorussia*, p. 130.

²⁰ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, 2001), p. 261.

²¹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 261.

²² Gross, *Revolution From Abroad*, p. 194.

²³ Z. S. Siemaszko, 'The Mass Deportations of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1940-41' in *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41*, ed. Keith Sword (London, 1991), p. 217.

²⁴ Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941-1945* (London, 1998), p. 52.

B.S.S.R. Furthermore, approximately 30 percent of those deported were Jewish.²⁵ This deportation of a section of the Jewish population from Western Belorussia, coupled with ‘the increase in the rate of intermarriage and the decrease in the number of B.S.S.R. Jews declaring Yiddish as their mother tongue (90% in 1926, 55% in 1939) indicat[ing] a process of acculturation’²⁶ in Eastern Belorussia, contributed to an increased homogeneity of identity in Belorussia.

Whilst there is a body of work that gives some attention to issues such as resistance to German rule, local collaboration with the invaders, and the events of the Holocaust, in Belorussia throughout 1941 to 1944, it is far from exhaustive. Furthermore, most works that discuss Belorussia in this regard do so as part of works that deal with the occupation of the Soviet territories as a whole such as Dallin's *German Rule in Russia*, or Mulligan's *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, or broader surveys of Belorussian history, such as Lubachko's *Belorussia Under Soviet Rule* or Vakar's *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation*, rather than specifically focused publications. This can result in having to piece together fragments of information, in an effort to gain an understanding of developments in Belorussia specifically. In each of the works covering these issues, there exists a deficit of discussion surrounding either the portrayal of Belorussian identity and, or, the portrayal to the public of events taking place. In the treatment of the development of resistance to the occupation, two strands of interpretation can be said to emerge. One, advanced by Grenkevich, views the development of resistance as a result of directives issued from the Soviet leadership, and the other, advanced by Lubachko and Vakar, views resistance as growing solely out of reaction to German behaviour in Belorussia. The directive-focused analysis gives primacy to the role played by appeals made from the Soviet authorities to resist, advancing the idea that ‘[t]he most effective means by which to summon mass participation in decisive armed struggle was through official addresses’.²⁷ With the focus being on the top-down mobilising effect of these addresses, the resulting analysis is one dimensional, neglecting the ambiguity or arbitrariness

²⁵ Gross, *Revolution From Abroad*, p. 269.

²⁶ Claire Le Foll, ‘The “Belorussianisation” of the Jewish population during the interwar period: discourses and achievements in political and cultural spheres’, *East European Jewish Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2008), p. 76.

²⁷ Grenkevich, *Soviet Partisan Movement*, p. 73.

introduced by people's own priorities or personal experiences. Such directives and appeals are credited with ensuring that the fight with the enemy became the central focus in the lives of the majority of the population.²⁸ On one hand, this approach, whilst making worthwhile points in terms of considering the role of such appeals, overlooks somewhat the influence that the actions of both the occupation and resistance forces would also have had on the attitudes and actions of the population. On the other hand, in discussing the issuing of official appeals and the role of propaganda, primarily printed materials, in conveying these to the public, Grenkevich's main focus is on the logistical aspect of dissemination, rather than the nature of the content therein. Thus, he does not reflect upon the portrayal of the nature of the war, the occupation and resistance, or the portrayal of Belorussian national identity and its relation to the broader Soviet struggle, in the propaganda material being received by those in the occupied B.S.S.R.

The second strand of interpretation of the development of resistance to the Nazi occupation in Belorussia, focuses on the population reacting 'in desperation'²⁹ to the harsh measures visited upon them by the Germans and their allies. Lubachko states that 'the Belorussian people saw no alternative but to fight.... the Germans burned whole villages and towns and massacred their populations, sometimes by shooting, sometimes by hanging, sometimes with public torture of the victims'.³⁰ Amongst the reasons listed by Vakar in explaining a shift in public mood towards resistance were mass execution of the Jews, mistreatment of P.O.W.'s, the high handed attitude of the Nazis, contempt for the Slavic race, and the labour draft for Germany.³¹ Coupled with the excessive violence inflicted on the population, changing German fortunes at the front are also attributed with encouraging the growth of resistance in Belorussia.³² This presentation is also one-dimensional, depriving the populace of the B.S.S.R. of authorship of their own actions, portraying them as only taking a given course as a result of the behaviour of the Germans. Despite these criticisms, it is worth remembering that both Vakar and Lubachko did not have the primary sources at their disposal that are currently available.

²⁸ Grenkevich, *Soviet Partisan Movement*, p. 73.

²⁹ Lubachko, *Belorussia*, p. 154.

³⁰ Lubachko, *Belorussia*, pp 156-157.

³¹ Vakar, *Belorussia*, p. 185.

³² Schulte, *The German Army*, pp 122-123; Shepperd, *War in the Wild East*, p. 110.

As members of the Belorussian emigré community, publishing their works in 1956 and 1972 respectively, they were reliant on secondary accounts and official documentary collections. However, their interpretation of events, which, like that advanced by Grenkevich, does highlight factors worth considering in terms of the overall development of the struggle, gives little consideration to the existence of various individual loyalties or the nature of their interaction with the various forms of propaganda circulated by either side, seeing the population's actions as being purely reactive to those visited upon them.

Like the discussion of the growth of resistance in Belorussia, treatments of the attempts by the Germans to encourage collaboration or acceptance of their rule focus almost exclusively on the mechanics of their policies, with scant reference to their attempts to win the support of the population through the use of propaganda, to show themselves in a positive aspect and vilify their enemies. Schulte does give an account of some of the various journals and newspapers that were made available for consumption by the public readership.³³ However, he gives no analysis of the content presented within these publications, therefore depriving the reader of any insight into the type of imagery and text that was being circulated, or the range of loyalties, biases, and stereotypes that were being played upon. This aside, the focus on German attempts to foster acceptance and collaboration is mainly centred on the consideration of the various policies they attempted to enforce. One of the main German ventures aimed at encouraging support and collaboration was that of agrarian reform. Mulligan suggests that '[o]f all the aspects of *Ostpolitik*, none possessed more significance than the exploitation of the Russian soil itself'.³⁴ Dallin cites an OKH report that reads, 'It is no accident that all reports... stress that the great mass of the Soviet population is interested exclusively in the question of collective system vs. private ownership, and therefore the promise to dissolve the collective farm system represents the most potent propaganda theme'.³⁵ Despite realising the great significance that the subject of agrarian reform held for the Belorussian peasantry, neither author discusses the attempts to portray this through the use of

³³ Schulte, *The German Army*, p. 157.

³⁴ Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion*, p. 93.

³⁵ OKH, report, August 24, 1941, cited in Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (London, 1981), p. 326.

propaganda with the aim of securing an acquiescent subject population.

Other measures taken by the occupation administration are approached in a similar fashion with regard to the discussion of how they were presented to the Belorussian population in an attempt to engage with loyalties, biases, and personal interests. Dallin, Lubachko, and Vakar, discuss German attempts to utilise Belorussian nationalist politicians, without mention of the extensive use of nationalist imagery and rhetoric in a wide variety of newspaper publications.³⁶ In like manner, Mulligan discusses the opening of schools,³⁷ whilst Dallin even acknowledges that '[t]he suppression of schooling was indeed a measure of most serious impact on popular attitudes in the occupied areas. It was amply exploited by Soviet propaganda as evidence of German intentions'.³⁸ Despite making this observation, he gives no outline of the use made, by Nazi propagandists, of the opening of schools by the occupation authorities in the attempt to shape the Belorussian public's outlook. Dallin also takes the same approach in discussing uses of religion by the authorities.³⁹ The issue of *Ostarbeiter*, those Soviet citizens taken to Germany to work, was one of great significance in Nazi occupied Belorussia. Whilst Dallin does investigate the mood in the public regarding this issue, he, once more, fails to discuss how the Germans attempted to promote this scheme through ensuring that it featured prominently in their propaganda material.

It is often stated that, in post-war Soviet literature and, indeed, official state memory of the war⁴⁰, the Holocaust and the role of Jews in the fighting is deliberately downplayed; that some works are 'marked by a clear tendency to play down, though not entirely disregard, the role of Jews in the war against the Nazis',⁴¹ or, that '[i]n the majority of [Soviet] works, no reference at all was made to the Holocaust; the murder of "Soviet

³⁶ Dallin, *German Rule*, pp 213-216; Lubachko, *Belorussia*, pp 158-164; Vakar, *Belorussia*, pp 188-190, 202-206.

³⁷ Mulligan, *Politics of Illusion*, p. 127.

³⁸ Dallin, *German Rule*, p. 462.

³⁹ Dallin, *German Rule*, pp 472-496.

⁴⁰ John Garrard and Carol Garrard, 'Barbarossa's first victims: The Jews of Brest', *East European Jewish Affairs* 28, no. 2 (1998), p. 42.

⁴¹ Mordechai Altshuler, 'Jewish Warfare and the Participation of Jews in Combat in the Soviet Union as Reflected in Soviet and Western Historiography' in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington, 1997), p. 155.

citizens” was stressed but the mass murder of Jews was completely ignored’.⁴² However, this portrayal, or lack of a portrayal, of Soviet Jews is not just a post-war phenomenon. In fact, the contrast between the presentation of Jews in Soviet and Nazi propaganda could hardly have been more stark. On the one hand, in Soviet propaganda they were scarcely mentioned at all, being simply amalgamated with other Soviet citizens. On the other hand, in Nazi propaganda, references to Jews featured regularly; being vilified as an all pervasive enemy and source of evil. Analysis of the Holocaust can also result in divergent interpretations of the role played by Belorussians being advanced. For example, Belorussians are shown to have been willing participants in the persecution of the Jews, venting their anti-Semitic sentiment. In one case, presented by Dean, an account of the mass murder of Jews in Mir, relates that a group of local Belorussian police was involved shooting down fleeing Jews in the street, driving Jews out of their houses and executing them at the killing site.⁴³ In contrast to this, Belorussians are also shown to have been tolerant, aiding Jews in escaping persecution. Smilovitsky argues that Belorussia differed from Western Ukraine and the Baltics, with anti-Semitic behaviour being more pronounced in those latter areas.⁴⁴ Epstein presents a model of Jews and non-Jews working together to save the lives of thousands of Jews by arranging for their escape from the Minsk ghetto to the partisans in the forest.⁴⁵ Some authors take extreme positions to categorically state that the Belorussian people should not be accused of anti-Semitism,⁴⁶ or that the Belorussian police were not involved in the murder of Jews, placing the blame instead on the Germans and Lithuanians,⁴⁷ or that the local population in Belorussia had no part at all in, and even opposed, the persecution of the Jews.⁴⁸ Whilst these latter positions may prove difficult to defend, the works of Dean,

⁴² Shalom Cholawski, ‘The Holocaust and the Armed Struggle in Belorussia as Reflected in Soviet Literature and Works by Emigres in the West’ in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington, 1997), p. 215.

⁴³ Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (London, 2000), pp 46-47.

⁴⁴ Leonid Smilovitsky, ‘Righteous Gentiles, the Partisans, and Jewish Survival in Belorussia, 1941-1944’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 8, no. 3 (1997), p. 301.

⁴⁵ Barbara Epstein, *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941-1943: Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism* (Berkeley, 2008), p. 18.

⁴⁶ Wiktor Ostrowski, *Anti-Semitism in Byelorussia and Its Origins* (London, 1960).

⁴⁷ Cholawski, ‘Holocaust and Armed Struggle’, p. 225.

⁴⁸ V. Kalush, *In the Service of the People for a Free Byelorussia, Biographical Notes on Professor Radoslav Ostrowski* (London, 1964).

Smilovitsky, and Epstein, present a fuller, more realistic (if the works are viewed as each presenting a different, yet not mutually exclusive, aspect of the event as a whole) picture of the differing attitudes in wartime Belorussian society when viewed together. This dissertation will take this approach in presenting the incidence of these various attitudes as existing side by side in the chaos of the Nazi occupation, within the public domain, rather than as being in separate spheres of existence.

In the coming chapters, this dissertation will discuss how both sides attempted to play on loyalties, biases, and concerns of the population of the B.S.S.R. in the way they portrayed aspects of the war, the occupation, and national identity; how these various concerns and loyalties interacted to produce an infinite number of opinions within the public opinion; and also, how existing work can be reconsidered in the context of a fuller picture to give a better understanding of the complex nature of the mindset of those living in Belorussia during the Nazi occupation.

Chapter 2: Belorussia - Dear Soviet Land!

In the struggle to promote patriotism and to gain a positive influence on the public mood within the occupied Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, the use of propaganda materials was of central importance. This chapter will examine the use of propaganda by the Soviet side in the attempt to develop a strong sense of patriotism within the Belorussian population, to garner support for the fight against the German occupation, and to shape the attitudes of the inhabitants of Belorussia to the war that was taking place in their midst.

Throughout the Nazi occupation, propaganda material was circulated in urban and rural areas by partisan brigades, the Communist Party of Belorussia, and the Komsomol structures in the B.S.S.R.¹ Some of this literature was produced by state publishing houses behind Soviet lines, whilst some was created in Belorussia itself. Initially, the Red Air Force dropped large quantities of leaflets into the occupied territory, but, as time passed, the partisans grew in strength and employed their own printing presses to produce propaganda material.²

One aspect of the attempts by the Soviets to foster patriotism and shape the public mood in support of the resistance to the German occupation was the attempt to create a link, in the minds of the population in occupied Belorussia, between the Soviet rear area, and the Red Army forces fighting at the front, and those living in the occupied zone. This can be seen through an examination of the various literature, in the form of leaflets, pamphlets, newspapers, news-sheets, posters and banners, that was disseminated throughout the B.S.S.R. during the period of occupation. For instance, the image on one news sheet (see fig. 1) depicts a Red Army soldier and a partisan fighter in opposition to a single German soldier.³ This image in itself carries the sentiment of those both within and outwith the occupied territories, symbolised by partisan and soldier, sharing a common enemy and goal. Perhaps of greater significance, however, is the background against which these figures are set. A web-like pattern emanates from Moscow, signified by an outline of the Kremlin against a backdrop of sun-rays, reaching out to and linking various Soviet cities

¹ National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, f. 1330, op. 1, d. 2.

² Shepperd, *War in the Wild East*, pp 111-112.

³ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 248, l. 15.

and towns as far as those in Belorussia. This serves to act as a demonstration of the continued link between Moscow, as the seat of Soviet rule, and those regions that were under German occupation, transcending, in the process, the frontline and its potential to be viewed as a rupture separating Belorussia from the rear area of the Soviet Union.

The creation of a sense of unity between the rear area of the U.S.S.R. and that behind German lines can be seen to be repeated consistently in the various forms of Soviet media circulated in Belorussia during the Nazi occupation. News sheets circulated in the region of the B.S.S.R. may on one hand depict graphic photo accounts of German atrocities against the civilian population,⁴ whilst in another instance the photos may present images from deep inside Russia of factory production lines and busy workers, rows of tanks and weaponry, and gleaming new aircraft. Posters produced by partisan brigades reflected events unfolding in places as far away as Stalingrad. One such poster (see fig. 2) portrays Hitler, in a tattered uniform, crawling away from the Caucasus whilst a giant red arm, labelled Red Army (*Krasnaya Armiya*), wields a sword upon him.⁵ The circulation of these images demonstrates the attempt to create a sense of common cause between Belorussians and those taking part in battles on the front, as well as those contributing to the effort behind Soviet lines. Furthermore, the production of leaflets by the Communist Party of Belorussia addressed to the youth, in the Belorussian language, giving instructions of how to destroy tanks,⁶ planes,⁷ telegraph and telephone communications,⁸ as well as how to blow up rail lines and derail trains,⁹ can be seen, along with their practical intent, as giving Belorussians the opportunity to play a role locally, but in the context of the broader Soviet war effort.

Noticeable in the Soviet literature circulated in Belorussia is the use of the Belorussian language, national motifs and symbolism, and the situating of these features of national identity within a broader context of Soviet patriotism and a commonality of purpose in

⁴ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 248, l. 27.

⁵ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 245, l. 7.

⁶ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 65.

⁷ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 67.

⁸ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 53.

⁹ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 55.

opposing the Germans and their allies. Peoples Poet of the B.S.S.R., Yanka Kupala, featured in one Belorussian language pamphlet consisting of an article by him, calling for the support of the people, as well as some of his own work, including a poem entitled ‘Kill the Germans’.¹⁰ Such literature explicitly identifies the Germans as the enemy of the Belorussian people, presenting their interests and loyalties as being naturally aligned to the rest of the Soviet Union in the prosecution of the resistance struggle. Another People’s Poet, Yacob Kolas, outlined this in a pamphlet that declared, ‘Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Georgians, Kazaks, Uzbeks, Kirgitz, Tadzikis, Armenians, Ural peoples, and Siberians - We are all one family of the great Soviet family of the great Soviet people, united by Stalin’s friendship of the peoples’.¹¹ The use of poetry was frequent in Belorussian language news publications such as *Crush the Fascist Vermin* (*Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu*), and was regularly paired with cartoons mocking the Germans,¹² or glorifying the Red Army.¹³ Posters were produced featuring figures in national dress,¹⁴ whilst traditional pattern often bordered blocks of text or pictures. The setting of Belorussian identity within a Soviet context is evident on a news-sheet front page bearing a large drawing of charging Red Army infantry and tanks, accompanied by aircraft overhead, with the caption ‘We Are Coming, Belorussia’.¹⁵ Beneath this is a block of text, written by Yakob Kolas, that begins ‘Belorussia, dear Soviet land’, bordered, at the bottom of the page, by traditional national pattern.

Soviet propaganda in Belorussia during the period of occupation also devoted considerable energy to the shaping of public perception of the Germans. This process adopted two modes; vilification and mockery. In vilifying the occupiers, Soviet literature depicted them as murderous and destructive harbingers of ruin and suffering for the Belorussian people. For example, posters made and distributed by a partisan brigade in Vitebsk Oblast depict a scene of destruction, with ruined buildings foregrounded by

¹⁰ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 1.

¹¹ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 8.

¹² *Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu*, No. 31 (February, 1942), in *I Pawstaw Narod . Facsimilnaye vidannye padpolnikh I partisanskikh gazet, chasopisaw, listovak periyadu Vyalikai Aichinnai Vaini, 1941-1945 gadaw*, eds A. V. Stefanovich and V. A. Rabkow (Minsk, 2005), p. 15

¹³ *Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu*, No. 38 (March, 1942), in *I Pawstaw Narod* p. 38

¹⁴ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 248, l. 47.

¹⁵ *Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu*, No. 39 (March, 1942), in *I Pawstaw Narod*. P 29

scattered corpses, amongst them a small child, with bloody head wounds.¹⁶ The caption reads forebodingly, “‘New Order’ in Europe’. This portrayal of the enemy gave rise to some rather striking and chilling artistic imagery. In one leaflet, the artist presents what, at first glance, appears to be nothing more than a portrait of Hitler (see fig. 3). However, closer inspection reveals his entire face to be a montage of grisly images alluding to a multitude of atrocities, telling a tale of death, destruction, and suffering by Belorussians at the hands of the Germans.¹⁷ This process represents a determined attempt to drive a wedge between the population of Belorussia and the occupying forces, with the intent to foster resistance amongst the populace.

In making the occupiers the brunt of ridicule, Soviet propaganda material depicted them as cowardly, pathetic figures, huddled in rags, broken by the experience of life in the East. The presentation of a before-and-after cartoon sequence was a common means of emphasising the destructive and demoralising effect of the Eastern campaign on the Germans. A classic example shows a fat German officer, puffing on a cigar, arms laden and pockets stuffed with an assortment of plundered foodstuffs and valuables.¹⁸ The succeeding drawing exhibits the same officer as a feeble character, hunched over a crutch, dressed in rags and bare-legged, heavily bandaged around the head. This presents the Germans as being figures to be scorned, doomed in their escapades, and certainly not to be feared. Some imagery presented the Germans in a deathly, almost Gothic, aspect; a drawing of a pile of skulls emblazoned with swastikas alluding to the impending failure and destruction that would befall the Axis armies.¹⁹ On other occasions, the occupiers would be portrayed as hapless or oafish characters, bearing the brunt of partisan exploits.²⁰ The message to the population of Belorussia was clear; that the occupation forces were not to be viewed as invincible or superior forces whose rule should be respected and adhered to, but rather as doomed figures to be viewed with disgust and contempt.

¹⁶ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 245, l. 17.

¹⁷ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 83.

¹⁸ Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 36 (March, 1942) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 24.

¹⁹ Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 61 (September, 1942) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 108.

²⁰ Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 64 (October, 1942) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 120.

Like the Germans, occupants of Belorussia that collaborated with the invaders, whether in a civil or a military capacity, were singled out for attention by Soviet propaganda material that was distributed in Belorussia during the occupation. The main thrusts of the Soviet efforts were to portray those working with the Germans as traitors to their fellow Belorussians, to caricature them as animalistic or monstrous, spineless in being controlled by the Germans, and to show them as self-serving individuals profiting from the suffering of others. One poster (see fig. 4), created and distributed by a partisan brigade, depicts three dog-like figures with monstrous faces on leads controlled by a German officer.²¹ The creatures represent collaborators in the civil apparatus, the police, and the military. Lying at the feet of these animal forms is a murdered mother and child, blood-stained from their injuries, whilst in the background can be seen the silhouette of bodies hanging from their injuries, whilst in the background can be seen the silhouette of bodies hanging from gallows'. Some images took the approach of portraying the collaborator as a dim-witted stooge being used by the Germans,²² whilst others showed a well dressed profiteer, fawning over the new rulers whilst their countrymen are being executed.²³ Soviet propaganda also featured appeals to collaborators to relinquish their allegiance to the Germans, and to turn their arms on their employers. One pamphlet encouraging this contains two frames of illustration.²⁴ In the first, the Belorussian collaborator is blindfolded, and on the end of a chain controlled by a German slave-master wielding a whip. In the second, he has cast off the blindfold and chain, and has turned his bayonet on the German, who has fallen to the ground. Thus, it can be seen how Soviet propaganda attempted to shape the perception of collaborators amongst the general population, as well as appealing to the collaborators themselves to switch sides.

If the Germans were objects of vilification and ridicule in Soviet propaganda, the polar opposite could be said of the image projected of the partisans and Red Army. These were portrayed as the embodiment of Soviet virtue and heroism, whilst also issuing an appeal to the sensibilities and sympathies of the Belorussian audience. Partisans were characterised in either youthful or elderly forms that the public could relate to. The

²¹ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 245, l. 22.

²² Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 59 (August, 1942) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 102.

²³ Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 65 (October, 1942) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 124-125.

²⁴ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 245, l. 32.

image of a young, smiling partisan could reflect the countenance of a brother or a son, whilst that of an elderly man carries the resonance of paternalism and caring responsibility. This allows the target of such propaganda to feel a bond with those portrayed within the imagery. This interaction between the viewer and the material allows the message of shared responsibility in the struggle to be conveyed, whilst also giving the audience a source of inspiration. The recipient may be treated to the image of a virtuous young partisan, pointing earnestly from a page, above the caption 'Your place is in the partisan ranks',²⁵ or a smiling youth (see fig. 5) proclaiming his exploits and questioning directly, 'You?'.²⁶ As well as creating a bond with the struggle being undertaken by fellow Belorussians, Soviet propaganda also used recognition of heroism to encourage support and active participation from the public. Detailed spreads celebrating the exploits of partisan Heroes of the Soviet Union,²⁷ would be intended to promote the emulation of such role models.

Similarly, Red Army personnel were portrayed as stoic defenders of the Soviet Motherland, determined combatants in the fight against the Fascist invader, and, along with the partisans, the hope of salvation for the occupied territories of the U.S.S.R. The promoted identity of the Soviet soldier encouraged the population to develop an affinity with and sympathetic outlook towards the Red Army. Publication of correspondence from a Belorussian mother to her three sons, fighting far away with the army, would have appealed to the sensitivities of mothers whose sons were soldiers fighting with the Soviet forces.²⁸ The letter, encouraging her sons to carry the fight to the Germans, finishes with the words 'I am shaking your hands as soldiers, but I am hugging you as a mother'. In posters and newspapers, the facial expressions of soldiers encouraged an emotional interaction between the image and the audience. Sometimes the soldier's would be a jolly face, bearing a broad smile and with sparkling eyes, presenting a warm image that could, perhaps, stimulate thoughts for a loved one involved with the fighting. The front

²⁵ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 73.

²⁶ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 136.

²⁷ Vitsebski Rabochi, No. 39 (7066)(29 October, 1943) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 260.

²⁸ Fragment of newspaper carrying an undated letter from M. M. Prudnikova to her three sons, held in the Belarussian State Museum of History of the Great Patriotic War, Minsk, Belarus. (This document does not bear a reference code, but is stored with letters to the woman from the front bearing the codes: KP-2-51367/44, KP-2-51367/80, KP-2-51367/20, KP-2-51367/81.

page of one issue of *Crush the Fascist Vermin* shows the image of a smiling soldier carrying a happy boy in his arms, the wreckage of a recent battle in the background, showing the human emotions that would arouse sympathy within the reader, whilst also being presented as a caring and noble protector.²⁹ In other instances, the soldiers exhibited a stern, resolute countenance, reflecting a steely determination to prosecute the fight until its victorious conclusion, regardless of the challenges faced.³⁰ The message contained within the various portrayals of Soviet soldiers was clear; that their struggle was that of the people in occupied Belorussia, and it was to them that allegiance and support should be given. Whilst the task of achieving the liberation of Soviet territory was portrayed as one requiring stern conviction and determination, the anticipated event itself was portrayed with warm imagery of friendly-looking troops being greeted by a happy, smiling, waving population, as the remnants of the German occupation lay torn down and destroyed.³¹ Thus, the interests and happiness of the population and the victory of the Red Army were symbolically interconnected in the imagery being conveyed to those living in Belorussia.

Whilst the portrayal of the partisans and the Red Army drew largely on images of Belorussian and, more broadly speaking, Soviet manhood, Belorussian womanhood also had a very significant role to play in the propaganda presented to those living in the occupied B.S.S.R. during the war years. The presentation of womanhood in Soviet propaganda assumed a dual significance; it could be seen to represent both the Soviet Motherland and the female population therein. Female characterisations were created that portrayed the violation of the Motherland (Rodina) and the enslavement and murder of the female population, as well as those that showed these figures in a defiant, inspiring, protective aspect, acting as a guiding influence over those fighting against the German occupation. One enormous poster, bearing the inscription 'For the Motherland', shows a female figure, cloaked in crimson red, with piercing eyes and holding a child in her arms, towering over a line of Red Army soldiers that are poised, faces wrought with steely

²⁹ Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 74 (January, 1943) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 159.

³⁰ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 248, l. 44.

³¹ Razdavim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 68 (November, 1942) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 138.

determination, to join the fight against the Germans.³² This articulates the inspirational and guiding influence of the Motherland, as well as showing it to be the nurturer of Soviet life. The theme of protectiveness whilst in the midst of struggle is recurrent, as in the case of a fearless looking female figure, hair flowing freely in the wind, sheltering a child with one arm whilst holding aloft a rifle in the other, the corpses of German soldiers strewn across the landscape behind her.³³ This heroic aspect emphasises the view of Soviet womanhood and the Soviet Motherland as being defiant, protective, and inspirational in the struggle against the enemy.

The presentation of Belorussian womanhood as vulnerable and the Soviet Motherland as violated was achieved through the use of images of murder, enslavement, and fear. These images would have been intended to play on the sensibilities of the population of the B.S.S.R. As with the attempts to portray Soviet womanhood and the Motherland in a heroic light, the representation of mothers and children was recurrent. The Communist Party of Belorussia and partisan brigades circulated posters, leaflets, and news sheets, conveying this message to the public. In one such poster (see fig. 6), a young woman, wearing a Belorussian patterned shirt, runs terrified clutching her child in her arms as, in the background, two Germans stand over the corpse of another woman, whom they would appear to have just killed.³⁴ Such fearful images would have been circulated in order to drive the population away from the Germans, in the hope of increasing support for the Soviet side in the war. Another means of attempting to make people fearful of the Germans and encourage them to support the resistance to their rule was to illustrate Belorussian womanhood as having been enslaved. One poster depicts a group of Belorussian women, having been taken to Germany, looking miserable, working carrying large heavy boxes of cargo under the watchful eye of an armed guard.³⁵ Another portrays a scene that resembles a cattle-mart. Only, instead of cattle, a bedraggled looking woman stands in the centre, barefoot, as the man in charge points at her with a large stick, whilst

³² N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 248, l. 44.

³³ Razdaviim Fashistskuyu Gadzinu, No. 66 (October, 1942) in *I Pawstaw Narod*, p. 127.

³⁴ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 248, l. 38.

³⁵ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 248, l. 43.

well dressed Germans look on as they would if viewing an animal.³⁶ This portrayal of the enslavement and dehumanisation of Belorussian womanhood, that may also be interpreted as representing the enslavement of the Motherland, would have been designed to strike a resonance with the population of Belorussia, stimulating the individual's fears of them or their family suffering the same fate.

The Soviet attempts to foster patriotism, garner support for the fight against the German occupation, and shape the attitudes and moods of the inhabitants of Belorussia towards the war were multi-faceted. Using materials produced both in Soviet and the occupied territories, they endeavoured to transcend the frontline and maintain, within the mindset of the population, a strong link between those under occupation and the Soviet rear area. Whilst giving great attention to the portrayal of Belorussian national identity, that identity was couched firmly within a broader Soviet identity. In vilifying the German occupation forces, the intent was to ensure that the local inhabitants saw them as the clearly defined enemy, whilst in ridiculing the Germans the aim was to ensure that they weren't viewed with awe as superior or invincible, but as beings to be scorned. Similarly, collaborators were portrayed as despicable characters that had betrayed their fellow Belorussians. However, they were offered a path to redemption that could be taken by turning on the Germans and joining the Soviet side. In the portrayal of the partisans and Red Army, the Soviets were trying to present the Belorussian population with characters that would either impress and inspire them with their determination, or with whom they could have a deep affinity and sense of commonality of purpose. The portrayal of womanhood and the Motherland was also intended to impress and inspire, whilst also intending to play on the population's fears and sensibilities of what may happen at the hands of the Germans. Combined, this approach was intended to appeal to the population of the occupied B.S.S.R. on many different emotional platforms. Whilst the material itself does not give an insight to its reception amongst the population, it does reflect the attempts to encourage their support for, allegiance to, and participation in the Soviet war effort.

³⁶ N.A.R.B., f. 1330, op. 1, d. 4, l. 74.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

Chapter 3: Shoulder to Shoulder - Germans and Belorussians

In the struggle to gain control of Belorussia, great efforts were made by the occupation administration to develop good-will and support through appealing to Belorussian nationalism, as well as the more routine concerns of the local population. This chapter will examine the use of Nazi propaganda materials to try and foster support amongst the local population by portraying the occupation authorities as being aligned with their interests, driving a wedge between them and the Soviet leadership and partisans, and portraying life in the occupied B.S.S.R. to be superior to that in the Soviet Union.

In the propaganda, produced in both Germany and Belorussia, directed towards the urban and rural population of the occupied B.S.S.R.¹ by the occupying administration and their allies, the themes and imagery of Belorussian nationalism feature frequently, as well as attempts to link the nationalist interests to those of the Germans. This message, produced by the German authorities following the advice of Belorussian figures such as Dr. Ivan Ermachenko², was articulated through the presentation of a dogged demonisation of the Communist leadership in Moscow, that created a clear inside/outside distinction between Belorussia and the wider U.S.S.R. Persistent reference was made to Belorussian national and cultural independence.

With attempts by the Soviets to appeal to Belorussian patriotism within the context of the U.S.S.R. are dismissed out of hand by the nationalists. One leaflet, under the title 'New Moscow Lie', states that '[i]n the last two decades of Bolshevik authority, they were trying to strangle any cultural movement of the countries under the yoke of Soviet rule, and now they are giving us promises that they will protect the national and cultural independence of these nations'.³ Another piece, from 21 September, 1941, in the *Minskaya Gazeta*, reflects, bitterly, that during the years of Soviet government '[o]ur legacy was cut in pieces. Belorussian traditions, our beautiful language and culture were destroyed... they were trying to destroy Belorussian identity'.⁴ This article carries on to

¹ Schulte, *The German Army*, pp 156-157.

² A former landowner, and leader of the Belorussian Self-Help Organisation, *Samapomach*, Ermachenko was to become chief adviser to Generalkommissar Wilhelm Kube. Vakar, *Belorussia*, p. 178, and Lubachko, *Belorussia*, p. 160.

³ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 18.

⁴ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/M-50, l. 5.

state that, having been liberated from the Bolsheviks, 'Belorussian culture will start blossoming.... Our duty is to fight for our national and social freedom, to fight for our culture, [and] to fight for the purity of the Belorussian language'.⁵ Against this backdrop, the Germans were portrayed as liberators and protectors of Belorussia's interests, and thus, Belorussia's fortunes were entwined with the success or failure of the German army. This perspective led to statements such as 'the Belorussian people are fighting for the victory of the new order over the old, hated one. We.... will go shoulder to shoulder with the German people until the final victory'.⁶ This demonstrates both the articulation of Belorussian nationalism, and clearly stated support for the German war effort.

In the literature disseminated throughout Belorussia during the Nazi occupation, the population were presented with material that characterised the German army and occupation administration in a positive aspect, in a manner that served to both impress local readers, depicting the Wehrmacht as all-victorious and unstoppable, and foster support through casting the Germans in a benevolent aspect, as having come to Belorussia in friendship. The good intentions of the occupation administration were stressed with pronouncements stating that their attention was 'turned exclusively to the development of [the population's] future and the happiness of this future which is important to the German government and the German people'.⁷ This benevolence was illustrated in pamphlets outlining German promises to give each peasant his own land.⁸ This was to be achieved through the dismantling of the Kolkhoz, the system of collective farming, stressing it as an act of kindness on the part of the administration, with statements such as 'Germans gave Belorussians this present - they eliminated the Kolkhoz, so the peasants can work on their own land'.⁹ In some cases the Germans were portrayed in an almost altruistic character, with assertions that 'German workers and peasants are on the front, and they are ready to die to protect your land'.¹⁰

⁵ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/M-50, l. 5.

⁶ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/G-12, l. 5.

⁷ B.R.A., f. 684, op. 1, d. 4, l. 9.

⁸ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 22-23.

⁹ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 32.

¹⁰ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/B-43, 01.04.43.

Coupled with these statements of kind intent, was the attempt to emphasise the military might of the Wehrmacht, portraying them as unbeatable, superior to any opposition in their path. One leaflet, bearing the headline ‘What does the second year of the war give?’, discusses the continued advance of the German army and the Red Army’s retreat, emphasising that Stalin’s ‘Not a Step Back!’ order had not been heeded by the Soviet forces which had retreated beyond the Volga and into the Caucasus.¹¹ Literature in this vein created the impression of a relentless German advance, with the Wehrmacht taking the initiative and inflicting colossal losses on the Red Army.¹² Furthermore, this was supported by imagery that highlighted German superiority to the public. A photograph of a Wehrmacht infantryman at the base of, what would appear to be, a decapitated statue of Stalin or Lenin demonstrates the destruction of the Bolshevik order by a rampant German army¹³, whilst another displays a Tiger tank advancing through trees in a show of mechanised ferocity that could serve to both impress and cow the population.¹⁴

Whilst showing the German army as a mighty, unstoppable colossus, routinely conquering vast areas of the Soviet Union, and the administration as acting benevolently towards its Belorussian subjects, propaganda in the occupied B.S.S.R. sought to portray life behind Soviet lines as beset by disorganisation, terror, and a daily struggle just to survive. An article (see fig. 7) in *New Word* (Novoye Slovo), in February 1942, entitled ‘In The Soviet Rear’, declared that ‘[i]n the Soviet home front, there is disorganisation, panic, and mess’.¹⁵ This article went on to state that the railways were full of Jews, Communists, and intelligentsia running to the Volga and Siberia, and that life and work in the Soviet rear had been destroyed. It also states that people supportive of Germany had come out against Stalin, that the NKVD had answered with ‘the most awful terror’, but would be unable to liquidate all who supported Germany in the Soviet home front. This chaotic presentation of life behind Soviet lines was a recurrent theme in anti-Soviet propaganda in Belorussia. A later article, in *Zarya* (Dawn), bore the headline

¹¹ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 34.

¹² B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 34.

¹³ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, 16.08.42.

¹⁴ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-12, l. 69.

¹⁵ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, l. 5.

‘Bolshevism - It is hunger, poverty, destruction, and death’.¹⁶ This article highlights conscription, working conditions, and food shortage, as sources of hardship for Soviet citizens. These sentiments are echoed in a headline proclaiming that the ‘population of the U.S.S.R. is exhausted by the war’.¹⁷ As proof of such sentiment, stories such as ‘Three Documents’¹⁸, based on three letters written by Soviet citizens that later came in to the Germans possession, and ‘Testimonies of Prisoners of War’¹⁹, in which a prisoner recounts the contents of a letter he received from his wife in Siberia, carried reports, as written by Soviet citizens themselves, of the grinding hardships that had to be endured in the home front.

In contrast to the bleak picture that was painted of life in the Soviet home front, the image that was presented of life in occupied Belorussia was one of prosperity and happiness. The means by which this message was conveyed was through the use of rich agricultural and industrial imagery, highlighting the re-opening of schools, and displaying a tolerance of religion whilst emphasising the combative attitude of Communism towards religious practice. Whilst feast days such as Easter were celebrated with full front-page news items,²⁰ other articles decried the anti-religious actions that had been carried out by Communists. One such article, ‘Religion and Communism’, listed the destruction of churches, burning of icons, shooting, torturing, and imprisonment of priests, amongst the offences committed, stating that a terrorised population had hidden their icons in their attics until the day the Germans liberated them.²¹ Through means such as these, the occupation administration attempted to portray themselves as ushering in a new era of religious tolerance for the people of Belorussia. Likewise, with the issue of schooling, nationalist newspapers exuded a sense of national development, celebrating that the ‘German authorities have allowed us to create our own national schools’.²² Such news, supported by headlines such as ‘Dear Belorussian School’ and ‘New Schools - New

¹⁶ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-34, l. 9.

¹⁷ B.R.A., f. 684, op. 1, d. 9, l. 2.

¹⁸ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-34, l. 19.

¹⁹ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-34, l. 15.

²⁰ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, l. 2.

²¹ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, 27.09.1942.

²² B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/M-50, l. 9.

Lives'²³, promoted the image of stability within the occupied B.S.S.R. Further adding to this positive image being created of Belorussia under Nazi rule, a wide range of images showing agricultural development and prosperity, trumpeting the abolition of collective farming, as well as industrial productivity, were widely used in the attempts to shape the public mood in favour of the occupation administration. Newspapers featured pictures of German soldiers playing music for peasants to celebrate the abolition of the Kolkhoz,²⁴ carts with hay stacked high atop,²⁵ and women harvesting a plentiful crop.²⁶ Other photographs would show images of industry, factory workers and heavy machinery, indicating an energy and vitality in Belorussia's productive capacity.²⁷ Upbeat articles, such as 'Life in the liberated areas', which discussed improvements to country life alongside competitions for the most beautiful village, as well as featuring a photograph of a group of men working on farm machinery newly arrived from Germany,²⁸ articulated a message of Belorussian regeneration and growth. Accounts of village competitions would also have been intended to engender a sense of stability and normality in the day-to-day running of the country, in keeping with the attempts to portray a positive conception of occupation life to the Belorussian population.

With the occupation being presented as a source of advancement, development, and stability for Belorussia, those who opposed it were demonised as bandits and harbingers of ruin, bringing death and destruction to the population, and trying to deprive them of the benefits that the Nazi occupation had bestowed upon them. The targets of this demonisation were the partisans and the Soviet powers in Moscow. Efforts were also made to counter Soviet propagandists, by portraying them as manufacturers of fiction as well as also referencing the abuses carried out by the Soviet leadership. For example, one cartoon depicts an artist trying to conjure up images of Nazi brutality. His assistant bounds delightedly into the room carrying two files, one marked 'Siberia' and the other marked 'NKVD', indicating that for brutality, one need look no further than the Soviets

²³ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-12, l. 3.

²⁴ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-12, l. 20.

²⁵ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-12, l. 2.

²⁶ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-34, l. 18.

²⁷ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-12, l. 60.

²⁸ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/Z-34, l. 14.

themselves.²⁹ Another cartoon (see fig. 8), portrays a propagandist, vodka bottle and shot glass by his side, writing at a desk with a sign behind him that reads ‘We are taking orders for all kinds of writing’.³⁰ His pen is being fed by a tube from a black box adorned with a skull and cross bones, indicating the poisonous nature of the material he is writing.

This discrediting of the Soviet leadership in Moscow was important for the creators of Nazi propaganda, as they then proceeded to link the partisans fighting in Belorussia with those they had fulminated against in the Communist leadership. Anti-Soviet propaganda cast partisans fighting against the occupation as the ubiquitous Jew-Bolshevik enemy, with statements such as ‘the aim of the bands containing Jewish-Soviet agents, and other dirt, is to steal, kill, and terrorise people, under direction from Moscow’.³¹ One leaflet declares that ‘[t]hanks to the Bolsheviks in Moscow, our forests are full of bandits who do little harm to the German army. However, they steal from and mug our people’.³² In some cases, those operating under the tag of ‘partisans’ were indeed no more than bandits³³, the Germans used the phrase universally when referring to partisans. One sketch (see fig. 9), depicting a sinister looking partisan skulking off into the night as a nearby cottage catches fire, bears the caption ‘Red partisans bring you death, destruction to your homes and country’.³⁴ Thus, the partisans fighting the occupation were presented to the people as murderous self-serving criminals, bringing destruction and hardship to the population of Belorussia.

Amongst the partisans, the NKVD, and Soviet propagandists, Stalin also featured regularly as a target for the ire of the occupation authorities’ publications. His was an image that was caricatured in many forms. He was often portrayed in animalistic forms. One newspaper carries the caption ‘Spider at work’ with a cartoon of Stalin’s head on a spider’s body in the middle of a web.³⁵ Another newspaper carries a sketch depicting

²⁹ B.R.A., f. 685, op. 2, d. 1, l. 3.

³⁰ B.R.A., f. 685, op. 2, d. 1, l. 3.

³¹ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 7.

³² B.R.A., f. 684, op. 1, d. 4, l. 14.

³³ Alfred J. Rieber, ‘Civil Wars in the Soviet Union’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 1 (2003), p. 150.

³⁴ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 32.

³⁵ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/R-82, l. 3.

Stalin with the body of a bull.³⁶ An anonymous hand wielding a sword emerges from behind a matador's cape, emblazoned with the words 'New Europe', indicating the death of the Stalinist system and the introduction of a new order. Scorn is poured on Stalin's attempts to use historic figures from Russia's past, as well as his relaxing of relations with the Orthodox Church, in an attempt to inspire the Soviet population to give their full support to the defence of the U.S.S.R. One cartoon, produced by Great Russian nationalists in late-1943/early-1944, portrays him wearing his Marshal's uniform, bedecked with a chain carrying an Orthodox cross, sitting on a throne decorated with a star, a hammer and sickle, and a crown.³⁷ He is asking, 'So, what do you think brothers? Do you like me more with this new look?' Stalin was also portrayed as being cowardly, hiding behind the suffering of the Soviet people, being presented as issuing his 'Not a Step Back' order whilst hurriedly running away from the frontline.³⁸ A cold callousness is also presented in some material, with Stalin being shown methodically walking up a huge mountain of Red Army skulls, keeping a tally as he goes.³⁹

If, in his approach to the plight of the Soviet people or his manner of conducting political affairs, Stalin is made to look cruel or devious, in his dealings with the Allied leaders Stalin is portrayed as being played along and made a fool of by his American and British counterparts. He is shown to be letting the U.S.S.R. bear the burden of the war, whilst Roosevelt and Churchill are seen to be having an easy time as a result of this. The use of animalistic imagery returns once more, as the reader is presented with a sketch of Stalin as a donkey, carrying a smug looking Churchill and Roosevelt on his back.⁴⁰ Stalin is gasping with the strain of the two men's weight, but keeps following a carrot being dangled by Churchill with 'Front II' written on it. In another portrayal, Stalin returns to human form, but this time finds himself knee-deep in water, carrying Churchill, Roosevelt, and, at the top, a Jewish character, on his shoulders. The figure of the Jew returns once more, as Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt, perform a 'Radio Concert', singing from a score entitled 'Lie', conducted by a Jew, indicating that the unity between

³⁶ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, l. 19.

³⁷ B.R.A., f. 203, op. 1, d. 1, l. 12.

³⁸ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, l. 92.

³⁹ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/R-82, l. 15.

⁴⁰ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, *Novoye Slovo*, 28 October, 1942.

the three was a farce, and that Stalin and the other leaders were figures that were easily led and manipulated.⁴¹ Thus, it can be seen that, whether the brutish or the foolish variety, the character of Stalin portrayed to the Belorussian public by the propaganda of the occupation authorities was intended to show him as an individual not worthy of their allegiance.

With Stalin, the Soviet system as a whole, and the partisans, being cast as enemies, and the German Army as liberators and allies, the message being delivered to the Belorussian public was that they would need to make a contribution to the collective struggle to defeat Communism and ensure the future of the new order in Belorussia. It was within this context that an attempt was made to justify the process of sending Belorussians to work in Germany. However, the relocation to Germany was advanced as being of benefit to those who undertook the move, firstly, on grounds of personal safety, in that they would be removed from the threat of violence that posed itself in the occupied B.S.S.R., secondly, that it would help contribute to the defeat of the Soviet system, ensuring a brighter future for Belorussia, and, finally, the range of means by which they could spend their leisure time. In appealing to people to move for their own personal safety, one leaflet carried the heading 'Who in their right mind would stay here? It will be their own fault if they die'.⁴² The appeal to help the war effort outlined that people were needed to replace those Germans who had gone to fight the war against Bolshevism.⁴³ This was supported by Orthodox Metropolitan Alexander calling on people to go to Germany, so that the 'sons of Germany' could go to the front to fight.⁴⁴ In promoting the idea of moving to Germany to work, the occupation authorities designed placards to outline some of the ways in which leisure time could be enjoyed by those who moved there to work, the *Ostarbeiter*. These placards showed images of Belorussians shopping in Berlin,⁴⁵ dancing and playing music by the sea,⁴⁶ and going on a swimming excursion by

⁴¹ B.R.A.(P.A.), 05/N-74, l. 43.

⁴² B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 4.

⁴³ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 28.

⁴⁴ B.R.A.(P.A.), 63.3(0)62/A-75, l. 82.

⁴⁵ B.R.A.(P.A.), 32B43-49.

⁴⁶ B.R.A.(P.A.), 32I29-147.

a river or lake (see fig. 10).⁴⁷ This demonstrates how the German administration attempted to portray the sending of the *Ostarbeiter* to Germany in a positive aspect.

The attempts of the Nazi occupation authorities to shape the public opinion in Belorussia were complex. Whilst propaganda material does not, in itself, establish how these efforts were received, it does demonstrate how the Germans endeavoured to win the support of the population. Through harnessing the force of Belorussian nationalism, they attempted to find a common ground with the local inhabitants in order to create a sense of shared struggle against the Soviet Union. Regardless of the reality of occupation life, they promoted the idea that they had come to Belorussia for the good of the people, and contrasted life behind Soviet lines with life in the Nazi controlled B.S.S.R., showing the people how better off conditions were because of their arrival. Those who attempted to oppose this occupation were demonised as murderers and bandits, bent on destroying the newly founded prosperity and stability, Stalin was portrayed as figure to be reviled and scorned, whilst anyone that opposed German influence was seen to be a puppet for the ever-present Jewish enemy. This approach of simultaneous glorification and vilification of things Nazi and nationalist, on one hand, and Soviet on the other, was intended to allow the Germans to establish a firm control on the country, whilst also ensuring support from the population in terms of both goodwill, and an actually tangible contribution to the war effort in the shape of working in Germany.

⁴⁷ B.R.A.(P.A.), 32B43-53.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

Chapter 4: Between the Hammer and the Anvil

The experience of the population of Belorussia under Nazi rule was one filled with stressful and contradictory experiences. They were presented with an army and administration of occupation, that claimed to have come for their benefit, to create a new bright future together, yet was responsible for untold hardship and widespread death and destruction. In addition to this, in opposition to the invaders, was the armed partisan forces, fighting in the name of liberation, yet also a source of hardship and danger for the civilian population. Furthermore, whilst both of these opposing forces were a source of concern for the Belorussians, they were also, at times, sources of assistance during this chaotic period. This chapter will look at the nature of these contradictions, as well as how these could lead to an emotional conflict between loyalties for individuals that experienced the disorder of life during the Nazi administration.

In the midst of the chaos of the Nazi occupation, one of the concerns that presented itself to the population of Belorussia was the threat of falling victim to violence meted out by the Germans, their allies, or their native adherents. Their capacity for visiting indiscriminate violence upon the local inhabitants was displayed from the earliest days following the launch of Operation Barbarossa. This was evident both through the visible implementation of the destruction of the Jewish population, as well as first-hand experience, by the non-Jewish population, of violence perpetrated by the Nazis. On 10 July, 1941, the Germans carried out their first, or one of the first, *Judenaktion* on Soviet territory, resulting in the deaths of over 6,000 Jews from the Jewish neighbourhood of Brest.¹ In Baranovichi, the non-Jewish population was also entangled in the horrors of the Holocaust when ‘all of the inhabitants - both Jewish and non-Jewish - of one of the city’s streets were executed because, to the Germans, they all looked Jewish’.² Later, having killed in excess of 30,000 Jews at Bronnaya Gora, from June to October, 1942, one account states that the Germans shot approximately 1000 people from the nearby area in an attempt to cover up their actions.³ This assertion is further supported by other

¹ John Garrard and Carol Garrard, ‘Barbarossa’s first victims: The Jews of Brest’, *East European Jewish Affairs* 28, no. 2 (1998), pp 19-22.

² Leonid Rein, ‘Local Collaboration in the Execution of the “Final Solution” in Nazi-Occupied Belorussia’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20, no. 3 (2006), p. 389.

³ Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, ed. David Patterson, trans. David Patterson (New Brunswick, 2002), pp 179-180

witness reports, relating to the events at Bronnaya Gora, in the Brest archives,⁴ indicating the filtering through of the effects of the Holocaust to the non-Jewish population.

The wider population also bore the brunt of excessive German violence outside of the specific context of anti-Jewish actions. From the outset, the occupiers attempts to establish control over the territory of Belorussia were ‘distinguished by startling brutality. Whole villages suspected of harbouring [Soviet] sympathisers were burned down’.⁵ Official figures state that, in the course of the occupation, 209 towns and 9200 Belorussian villages were destroyed, with many of these villages being so completely erased that they were never reconstructed after the war.⁶ For example, a German report from September, 1942, states that in the village of Zablotye, near Brest, 289 people were shot dead, 151 farmsteads were burned down and 700 cattle, 400 pigs, 400 sheep and 70 horses were seized. Only five of the local families were released following interrogation.⁷ Such actions were not just restricted to rural areas and small towns either. This was witnessed in Gomel, in 1942, where, in response to acts of Soviet sabotage, the Germans rounded up a large group of inhabitants, tortured them, and then took them to the centre of the city where they were shot in public.⁸ In retaliation to the dynamiting of the Gestapo dining hall in Minsk, in 1943, Generalkommissar Wilhelm Kube ordered the wholesale execution of the inhabitants of two streets.⁹ Such methods were endorsed by the German leadership. In September 1941, an OKW directive established a reprisal ratio of 50 to one hundred locals to be executed for each German soldier killed,¹⁰ whilst on 16 December, 1942, Hitler instructed that anti-partisan warfare was to be conducted “‘with the most brutal (*allerbrutalsten*) means... against women and children as well”. The order moreover exempted German soldiers from accountability under military law¹¹ for their actions against the Belorussian population. This approach placed a huge burden on the non-combatant inhabitants, as in the case of Operation KOTTBUS in June, 1943. In

⁴ B.R.A., f. 514, op. 1, d. 289.

⁵ Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, p. 210.

⁶ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, p. 131.

⁷ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, p. 127.

⁸ Lubachko, *Belorussia*, p. 157.

⁹ Vakar, *Belorussia*, p. 193.

¹⁰ Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion*, p. 138.

¹¹ Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion*, p. 140.

an anti-partisan sweep, the Germans encountered stiff resistance. However, when the partisans slipped away, the operation descended into a slaughter of the local population, with over 6,000 killed and 599 taken prisoner for the recovery of only 480 rifles.¹² Thus it can be seen how, throughout the entire period of Nazi occupation, the threat posed to personal safety by the Germans posed as a concern for the citizens of Belorussia.

As well as the risk of being murdered by the German armed forces and their local collaborators, another source of concern for the people of Belorussia was the threat to personal safety posed by the seizure of men and women for forced labour in Germany. This idea began to develop shortly after the invasion of the Soviet Union, by early 1942 being seen as a large-scale means of addressing Germany's shortage of industrial and agricultural manpower, and thus allowing more Germans to be available for military service. Initially, recruitment was on a largely voluntary basis, however, the abominable treatment of the first labour shipments rapidly became known in Belorussia, resulting in a sharp decline in numbers presenting themselves for work in the Third Reich by the summer of 1942.¹³ With little or no voluntary labour forthcoming, the occupation administration resorted to harsh measures in order to fulfil the demand for labour. People were 'rounded up arbitrarily in market places, movies, and churches'.¹⁴ A German OKH report on the issue stated that those drafted for labour service sought to avoid being sent to Germany by any means, resulting in 'an intensification of German counter-measures: among others, confiscation of grain and property; burning down of houses; forcible concentration; tying down and mishandling of those assembled; forcible abortion of pregnant women'.¹⁵ Forced labour was also used in the territory of Belorussia. In a letter addressed to her father, which was discovered after the war, a fifteen year old girl relates the horrors of her life working as a slave for a German household. She is treated like an animal, being forced to eat from a trough alongside two pigs, forbidden to enter the rooms of the house, living instead in the barn and also being subject to terrible beatings. Writing on her fifteenth birthday, she describes her shocking appearance and how she

¹² Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion*, pp 142-143.

¹³ Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, p. 430.

¹⁴ Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, p. 435.

¹⁵ OKH report, cited in Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, p. 435.

coughs up blood due to poor health.¹⁶ With workers being subject to harsh mistreatment, the forced recruitment of labour by the occupation authorities can be interpreted as a source of concern and worry for the inhabitants of Belorussia.

Whilst, on one hand, the citizens of the occupied B.S.S.R. had reason to be fearful of violence coming from the occupation forces, on the other hand, they also had reason to fear the actions of the partisans that were resisting the Germans and collaborators. The village elder of Okuninovo, south of Baranovichi, described the predicament as living ‘between the hammer and the anvil. Today we are forced to obey the partisans or they will kill us, tomorrow we will be killed by the Germans for obeying them’.¹⁷ The partisan threat to the Belorussian population came in the form of breakdowns in discipline, or the use of terror in order to either secure compliance with their wishes, or to exact revenge against, individuals, or communities, suspected of collaboration with the Germans. This can be seen through examining internal partisan disciplinary reports, records of complaints made to partisan brigades about the behaviour of their members by the civilian population, and reports made to the local police working for the occupation administration. For example, a police report from May, 1942, states that, on the night of the 25th, partisans were seen in villages in the Baranovichi area threatening the inhabitants with revenge for Communist activists that had been shot by the police.¹⁸ Another report from October of that year describes how a peasant’s house and barn, containing livestock, were burned by partisans, who also threatened to kill his wife, as an act of revenge.¹⁹ Threats to kill were also recorded as having been issued to agricultural workers working for the Germans, and families that had relatives working in the police.²⁰ Partisans were also reported, in September 1942, as being responsible for forcing many of the male inhabitants of a village in the area of Baranovichi to leave with them.²¹

In addition to the fear of revenge attacks and intimidation, the partisans were also a

¹⁶ ‘Yes, Dad, I’m the slave of a German baron, too...’ in *The Soviet Union, A Documentary History: Volume 2: 1939-1991*, eds Edward Acton and Tom Stableford (Exeter, 2007), p. 111-112.

¹⁷ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, p. 146.

¹⁸ B.R.A., f. 995, op. 1, d. 7, l. 4.

¹⁹ B.R.A., f. 995, op. 1, d. 4, l. 27.

²⁰ B.R.A., f. 995, op. 1, d. 7, l. 110.

²¹ B.R.A., f. 995, op. 1, d. 7, l. 111.

source of suffering for the population through acts of indiscipline and violence committed by their members. Archive sources regularly feature reports of complaints made by local inhabitants to partisan commanders, as well as internal disciplinary reports documenting the misdemeanours of members of partisan groupings. One such report, from December 1943, details how the occupants of the village of Staro-Mlin, Brest Oblast, complained to the commissar in question that some drunken members of the 'Soviet Belorussia' brigade had beaten up a peasant for refusing to share his vodka with them.²² Another report from the same village tells of partisans beating up a woman in their attempts to take a saddle from her.²³ The records of other partisan brigades reflect similar tales of indiscipline and abusive behaviour. A letter sent to the 'Stalin' brigade, by a citizen from the village of Gaikovyany, Kobryn region, requests that a member of the brigade be punished for beating him up and threatening to burn his house.²⁴ Crimes committed could also be of a sexual nature, as shown by a report concerning an act of rape carried out by a partisan.²⁵ In another case, a memorandum confirms the public execution, in the village of Franopol, of a partisan who attempted to rape a woman, in that village, as well as getting drunk and shooting another woman in the shoulder.²⁶ Other reports document partisans being excessively drunk and behaving violently towards women.²⁷ Whilst many of the available documents from partisan sources date from 1943 onwards, it is reasonable to consider the likelihood that this does not reflect a rapid decline in partisan discipline at this time, but rather that earlier transgressions may not have been recorded and preserved in such detail. Initially, small groupings of partisans would have had little need for such procedures, whilst a growth in numbers would necessitate a more formal process (For example, one partisan detachment, 'Iskra', based in the Nalibocka forest, developed from a group of less than ten men to one that numbered three hundred²⁸). Thus, these sources, along with material from police reports, can be seen to indicate the extent to which the partisans constituted a threat to the personal safety and security of the population of Belorussia, during the Nazi occupation.

²² N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 346, l. 10.

²³ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 346, l. 9.

²⁴ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 379, l. 1.

²⁵ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 346, l. 14.

²⁶ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 379, l. 11.

²⁷ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 346, l. 12-13.

²⁸ Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The True Story of the Bielski Partisans* (Oxford, 2008), p. 96.

In addition to the very considerable threat of death and physical violence posed to the citizens of Belorussia by both the Germans and the partisans, the population was also faced with the problem of forcible requisitioning, by both sides, of foodstuffs, livestock, and other materials. This left those effected with a daily struggle to survive. One German field report, dated 7 May, 1942, states that, '[t]he small farmer has things really hard.... The Wehrmacht takes his last horse away from him and often even the last cow, while the partisans on the other side rob of him what's left'.²⁹ For the partisans, these actions were viewed as a matter of necessity. One veteran reflects that 'a partisan was something between a hero and a robber. We had to live and we had to deprive the peasants of their meagre belongings. These natives were punished by the Germans and by us'.³⁰ Partisan raiding accounted for the loss of over half the grain and meats produced in Belorussia during the economic year from June, 1942, to May, 1943.³¹ Sometimes, however, the actions of the partisans went beyond the boundaries of necessity, as experienced by one man who wrote to the commander of a partisan unit in the Minsk region to complain that his cow was stolen by a partisan and exchanged in a village in the area for vodka.³² In another example, from the summer of 1943, the commander of a partisan brigade is writing to his superior, the commander of the partisan formation of the Minsk region, Comrade Vasiliev, to complain about excessive requisitioning of cattle being carried out by other brigades in the area, citing the distress being caused to the local population.

From the outset of the invasion, the Germans' approach reflected an ideological viewpoint that placed the needs of the population far below their own in importance, holding the view that food allowed for the local inhabitants was food denied to the German people and their own families.³³ As early as July, 1941, the first requisition of cattle and foodstuffs was sent to Baranovichi.³⁴ Throughout the occupation, the losses

²⁹ German Field Report, cited in Schulte, *The German Army*, p. 94.

³⁰ Tec, *Defiance*, p. 100.

³¹ Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion*, p. 95.

³² N.A.R.B., f. 1405, op. 1, d. 19, l. 7.

³³ Schulte, *The German Army*, p. 102.

³⁴ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, p. 105.

sustained by the population at the hands of the Germans made life extremely difficult. Immediately after the liberation of Belorussia by the Red Army, a Soviet Extraordinary Commission set about establishing the extent of the material loss inflicted by the Germans. In an example of the type of losses reported, one peasant states that, over the course of the occupation, their house and animal shed had been burned, along with the seizure of two cows, two calves, two horses, six sheep, two pigs, forty chickens, seven geese, three ducks, 2,600 kilos of grain, 1,300 kilos of oats, 300 kilos of barley, 200 kilos of rye, 2,500 kilos of potatoes, 500 kilos of vegetables, and seven fruit trees.³⁵ Many others registered similar losses with the Commission. Whilst allowances must be made for some exaggeration in the presentation of these figures, due to being compiled by 'Party officials with a good grasp of Soviet propaganda aims'³⁶, they do, nonetheless, help to give a sense of the scale of the losses incurred by those living under the Nazi occupation. Coupled with the loss of food and livestock to the partisans, this presented the Belorussian peasants with a constant day-to-day struggle to survive.

Whilst those enforcing the German occupation and the partisan resistance were a source of hardship for many citizens of the occupied B.S.S.R., they were also, paradoxically, a source of assistance for many during this period. In the chaos of the occupation, desperation led some individuals to turn to either side in the hope of being granted some aid to relieve the seriousness of their situation. Under the auspices of the occupation administration, 'self-help' bodies, such as the Belorussian Self-Help Organisation, *Samapomach*, under the control of Dr. Ivan Ermachenko, and the Belorussian Committee of Mutual Assistance, were established to fulfil the role of the Red Cross.³⁷ Archive material shows that the Committee of Mutual Assistance in Brest was active in distributing aid from August 1941 until July 1944. Citizens petitioned with letters outlining the difficulty of their circumstances. One woman, injured in Brest Fortress during the invasion, related how she had lost all her belongings in a fire. She had nowhere to stay and needed to have her wound tended to, but had no money at all to pay for the treatment. The resolution, dated 4 September, 1941, stated that she was sent to

³⁵ B.R.A., f. 514, op. 1, d. 153, l. 15.

³⁶ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, p. 117.

³⁷ Lubachko, *Belorussia*, p. 160.

see a doctor, provided with somewhere to live, and given twenty roubles.³⁸ Another document, dated 18 June, 1943, shows that financial assistance was given to a man who had been evacuated to the area with his heavily pregnant wife, but had been unable to find work.³⁹ As late as June, 1944, financial aid was allocated to a woman whose husband had died of tuberculosis, leaving her to care for a six year old child.⁴⁰ Similarly, inhabitants of Belorussia also requested assistance from partisan commanders in difficult situations. In one case, a man has requested that he be given a cow and some grain for sowing. Whilst consent is not forthcoming for him to receive a cow, the provision of grain is granted.⁴¹ In another example, the wife of a partisan fighter in Minsk Oblast is petitioning his commander to allow him home. She is struggling to manage with three small children and her 80 year old grandmother, whose own house was burned down by the Germans. The commander's resolution states that the man is allowed home on leave. Thus, it can be seen that both the Germans and collaborators, and the partisans, could be viewed in conflicting aspects, as both bringers of violence and catastrophe as well as providers of assistance in times of dire need.

Combined with the stresses and worries caused by the fear of a violent death, due to the activities of the Germans and partisans, or the daily struggles of trying to survive through the adversities created by the conflict taking place, the population of Belorussia had their own very personal and individual motivations shaping their outlook and attitude towards the events of the Nazi occupation as they unfolded all around them. Whilst these may have manifested themselves in the assumption of stances that could be referred to by broad terms such as 'pro-Soviet', 'anti-Soviet', or 'pro-German', such general categorisations disguise the complexity of considerations and experiences contributing to the opinions of inhabitants of the occupied B.S.S.R. These varying motivations are encountered when examining primary source material. Some people's outlook during the occupation was shaped by personal experiences that had taken place in the years prior to the German invasion. In a letter to her sons, fighting with the Red Army, one woman

³⁸ B.R.A., f. 203, op. 1, d. 1, l. 82.

³⁹ B.R.A., f. 203, op. 1, d. 1, l. 108.

⁴⁰ B.R.A., f. 203, op. 1, d. 1, l. 119.

⁴¹ N.A.R.B., f. 1405, op. 1, d. 847, l. 81.

talks of her pride in the Soviet Union, expressing her allegiance to the system that had allowed her, a former servant girl, to go on to become a teacher.⁴² In another case, a man, described as an ex-kulak in a partisan report from Brest Oblast, had been imprisoned by the Soviets before the war. When the Germans came he was released and had been collaborating with them thereafter.⁴³ The thrust of this partisan document indicates that this man's earlier experiences had the effect of turning him avowedly anti-Soviet. Likewise, another partisan report of a man who, when the invasion took place, began spreading word about the end of Soviet power and personally led the Germans to a Soviet activist in the village of Ivanovka, Kosovskovo region.⁴⁴ Whilst these examples offer particularly clear-cut cases of individuals whose outlook can be categorised in terms of 'pro' or 'anti' Soviet, there are other scenarios to consider that endorse a more chaotic and ambiguous interpretation of the opinions of the population in Belorussia during the Nazi occupation.

The complex nature of the interaction between the various considerations at play, for the individual residing in occupied Belorussia, can be illustrated through the discussion of a number of examples. The archives of the Belarusian State Museum of History of the Great Patriotic War, in Minsk, contain a number of documents, submitted from private collections, showing that some letters from Belorussians fighting in the Red Army were still getting through to their families in the territory under Nazi control. One such letter contained a resolute vow of fighting to the end⁴⁵, whilst another told of a father desperately missing his family whilst also fighting determinedly against the Germans.⁴⁶ The second of these authors penned another letter two weeks later that contained the words, '[o]ur Motherland and our people have done, and are still doing, everything possible in order to help the Red Army. The Red Army, in their turn, is doing all that is possible to destroy the Germans'.⁴⁷ Whilst possibly written with a thought in mind for a

⁴² B.S.M.H.G.P.W., undated letter from M. M. Prudnikova to her sons.

⁴³ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 349, l. 1.

⁴⁴ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 346, l. 36.

⁴⁵ B.S.M.H.G.P.W., KP-2-51367/20. A letter, dated 20.06.1942, from Yuri Prudnikov to his mother.

⁴⁶ B.S.M.H.G.P.W., KP-2-68803. A letter, dated 27.12.1941, from Vladimir Yakovlevich Yatskevich (who later died in the battle for Stalingrad) to his family.

⁴⁷ B.S.M.H.G.P.W., KP-2-68804. A letter, dated 10.01.1942, from Vladimir Yakovlevich Yatskevich to his family.

third party censoring the content of any correspondence, these messages would nonetheless have served to act as an emotional link between the Red Army soldiers at the front, and their families behind German lines in occupied Belorussia. However, a conflict of emotions could present itself to a mother or wife, with sympathetic thoughts for a loved one in the army, if faced with the spectre of the local partisans responsible for requisitioning food and livestock, or behaving in a violent or drunken manner. Likewise, those with loved ones active in the occupation police force may also have experienced an emotional clash of conflicting loyalties between their affinity with a loved one and revulsion at the acts carried out by their comrades.

Archive material further shows statements that ‘the fight with the enemy became the central focus in the lives of the population’⁴⁸ to be a sweeping summation of the public response to the war. In living, day to day, people still had their own personal concerns to worry about and, for some, it is evident that these clearly came before ‘the fight’ with any enemy. A partisan intelligence report on the mood in a village in Minsk Oblast reports a conversation between two men in which one state that ‘the Germans are good because when [he] was held in captivity by them, they gave [him] enough vodka and cigarettes’.⁴⁹ One striking aspect of this report is that it was dated 23 March, 1944, when the war was clearly going in the favour of the Soviet Union; yet this man saw this as a position worth articulating. Another report, from 23 June, 1943, shows the collection of firewood to be the most pressing concern for two men, rather than the fight against the Germans.⁵⁰ In a report from another partisan grouping in Minsk Oblast, dated 2 July, 1943, the commander writes that he spoke to a man who said he thought the partisans were bad because they took his cow.⁵¹ One illuminating case, that displays well the intersection between the commitment to patriotic action and personal concerns, is that of a man discussing recent partisan activity in his locality. In the course of the fighting a number of civilians were killed, including his niece. This man states that, had this not happened, the people would have been delighted to see the partisans, but now they are just terrified

⁴⁸ Grenkevich, *Soviet Partisan Movement*, p. 73.

⁴⁹ N.A.R.B., f. 1405, op. 1, d. 1019, l. 9.

⁵⁰ N.A.R.B., f. 1405, op. 1, d. 1019, l. 3.

⁵¹ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 507, l. 3.

to have them in the area.⁵² Whilst other citizens of the B.S.S.R. clearly made their contribution to the fight a priority, like one old man who enthusiastically helped the partisans over a long period of time, even giving them his last pair of boots⁵³, these archive reports show the complex intersections between patriotic action and personal priorities that took place for Belorussians living under Nazi rule.

In many reports it can be difficult to judge how reliable the judgement of people's attitudes can be. One Soviet report, detailing political work carried out by a partisan brigade in Brest Oblast, describes the political morale as being on a very high level, with people saying they are waiting for the Red Army and expressing their support of the partisans.⁵⁴ However, on reflection, their enthusiastic responses may have been shaped more by the fear of appearing unreliable to the partisans, rather than being genuine expressions of how they actually felt. Furthermore, the author of the report may have been seeking to exaggerate the effectiveness of the brigade's work, as a result giving an inaccurate reflection on the response of the population. In cases of individual switching sides, from being in the police force to joining the partisan ranks, the lines are blurred between patriotic action and acting out of personal interest. Whilst for some, this decision may have represented a genuine change of position, for others the promise, contained in appeals to desert to the partisans, not to kill former collaborators would have represented a chance to escape Soviet retribution when the tide of the war turned against Germany.⁵⁵ In other reports, however, the outlook of the subjects were less debatable. A report, dated 25 June, 1943, told how a veteran of the Finnish war, a recipient of a medal for bravery, had refused to join the partisan ranks, saying that he had fought before and didn't want to do so again.⁵⁶ In this case, the man in question gave clear preference to living a quiet life over patriotic endeavour.

In conclusion, it can be seen that life in Nazi occupied Belorussia was beset by upheaval and worry, characterised by the contradictions presented by the opposing sides in the

⁵² N.A.R.B., f. 1405, op. 1, d. 1019, l. 5.

⁵³ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 379, l. 7.

⁵⁴ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 77, l. 17.

⁵⁵ N.A.R.B., f. 1399, op. 1, d. 60, l. 9.

⁵⁶ N.A.R.B., f. 1401, op. 1, d. 507, l. 3.

conflict. The life of the civilian population was one where fear of death, chaos, the struggle to provide for living were regular experiences. Along with the experience of Nazi rule, for some the memories of Soviet rule loomed large. This led to the interaction between each individual's professed national and ideological loyalty and their personal concerns being complex in nature. Thus, whilst, actions taken may have fitted under broad terms such as resistance or collaboration, the opinions that led to those measures were fragmented, chaotic, and difficult to measure or define; actions being dictated by pragmatism and opportunism as well as ideology and patriotism.

Conclusion

The purpose of the analysis in this dissertation is not purely to demonstrate the efforts of both warring powers to turn public opinion in their favour, but also to outline the complexity of public reactions. Soviet propaganda attempted to transcend the frontline, giving attention to the portrayal of Belorussian national identity, but doing so within the context of a broader Soviet identity. The Germans and collaborators were identified as the enemy and a threat to the personal well being of the inhabitants of Belorussia, whilst the Red Army and Partisans were portrayed both as inspirational and characters with whom a deep personal affinity could be formed. Soviet propaganda also appealed to personal fears and sensibilities, indicating that the personal safety of the individual was dependent on Soviet victory. Through air delivery from behind the frontline, as well as production in Belorussia, this visually stimulating material was circulated throughout the urban and rural population.

Nazi propaganda also tried to both appeal to the patriotic loyalty of the inhabitants of Belorussia, whilst also indicating that Nazi rule was the best guarantee of an improved standard of living for the individual. In harnessing the voice of Belorussian nationalism, they were attempting to find common ground to share with the local population. The Germans stated repeatedly that they had come to Belorussia for the good of the people, speaking of creating better living conditions than in Soviet territory. Regardless of how this may have differed from the reality of their presence, that was the message advanced in their literature. Just as the Soviet vilified the Germans and collaborators, so too, in Nazi propaganda, were the Soviets and partisans opposing the occupation demonised as Jew-Bolshevik murderers and enemies of the Belorussian people; a threat to the improvement of lifestyle. This discussion of the use of propaganda by the Germans and Soviets clearly demonstrates the attempts of both sides to interact with public opinion, and win the support of the people living in Belorussia.

Finally, caught in the middle, the civilian population had to contend with the violence and threat of death coming from both sides; all the while, each portraying the other as murderous barbarians and a threat to the well-being of Belorussia as a nation and the Belorussians both individually and collectively as a people. Both sides were a threat to

the survival of the population through their taking of belongings, food and livestock, as well as also being a source of assistance at certain times. Both the Nazi and the Soviet forces included sons, brothers, and fathers of inhabitants of Belorussia amongst their ranks, creating a bond of loyalty to the ranks that were the source of such chaos and uncertainty. This chaos obliged people to adopt survival strategies that are not adequately described by the simple polarities of collaboration or Soviet patriotism. Attempts to appeal to anti-Soviet sentiment or to Soviet patriotism were undermined by the pressures of the situation in which people found themselves. These obliged the population to negotiate with diverse local authorities (from partisans, local police and the German Army) in a largely pragmatic manner. Thus, in the discussion of patriotism, propaganda and public opinion in this dissertation, it can be seen that rather than being straightforward and formulaic, public opinion in Belorussia was fragmented, chaotic, and often contradictory during the Nazi occupation.

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